

ALUMNI PROFILE: DR. EDUARDO CARRILLO '00

A Commitment to Serving the Underserved Takes Root in South Texas

As a freshman at The Johns Hopkins University with his sights set on a Ph.D. in molecular biology, Dr. Eduardo Carrillo '00 had a life-changing experience. Back in San Antonio, his mother, Juana Carrillo, was in excruciating pain and could find no relief. "She had been working as a housekeeper at a hotel and had suffered a severe herniated lumbar disk while lifting a rollaway bed," Carrillo said. "Because she didn't speak English, she was having a very difficult time communicating and understanding the physicians she was seeing. I was disappointed by the medical system, and felt that my family was being discriminated against because of our minority status and lack of insurance. I made up my mind that the only way to improve the system was to become a physician and make changes myself."

Carrillo had inherited his strong sense of family from his father, Heberto Carrillo. When Eduardo was a little boy, his father, the eldest of nine children, had moved his family from San Antonio back to Durango, Mexico, to help his parents and siblings care for their corn fields and tend to their goats.

By the time the family returned to San Antonio, Carrillo was ready to start second grade. Fluent in Spanish but unable to speak English, his initial years in the U.S. educational system proved to be difficult. But by the time he entered Fox Tech High School, he had found his stride. There, a teacher noticed his passion and talent for science, and encouraged him to enter the Alamo Regional Science and Engineering Fair. Carrillo advanced to the International Science and Engineering Fair competition in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he competed against students from other countries. "I was 15 years old," he noted, "and it was the first time in my life I had ever been on an airplane. To say I was excited would be an understatement."

As a result of his success, Carrillo was invited to a summer research camp in Bar Harbor, Maine, where one of his counselors was from Johns Hopkins. "When I returned to San Antonio after that experience and talked to my high school's college counselor about Johns Hopkins, she discouraged me from applying, saying I would not get in. That helped me make up my mind, and Hopkins turned out to be the only school I applied to." Carrillo received a full scholarship.

After being away from home at college for four years—and with his heart set on a career in medicine following

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Dr. Eduardo Carrillo '00 and his wife, Liz

his mother's experience—Carrillo applied to the School of Medicine at the UT Health Science Center in San Antonio. His four years of medical school proved to be challenging but equally rewarding, particularly his third and fourth years. While several professors had a significant impact on Carrillo's medical education, Dr. Miguel Bedolla, a primary care physician and ethicist, changed his approach to practicing medicine. "Dr. Bedolla's persistent desire to help medical students, especially minorities, inspired me to serve underserved communities as a physician," he said.

In medical school, Carrillo also learned about the importance of listening to patients and having an excellent bedside manner. "More than 90 percent of the time," he remarked, "your patient will tell you the diagnosis if you, as a physician, are willing to listen."

After completing his residency at the University of Texas (San Antonio) Family Practice Residency Program in McAllen, Texas—during which he performed some 300 deliveries and 100 C-sections—Carrillo began moonlighting at St. Marie Clinic P.A. in Mission, Texas, where the group of providers saw between 60 and 70 patients a night. By the time Carrillo became an attending physician at the clinic, he had developed solid relationships with whole families who were seeing him as patients. "It was extremely satisfying to me that these families were so grateful for my services," he remarked. When presented with the opportunity to purchase the clinic from its 78-year-old founder in August 2004, Carrillo and his wife, Liz, who serves as the clinic's executive administrator, decided to take control of their future. Since that time, St. Marie Clinic has opened three new clinics, grown from 10 employees to 130 employees, and sustained 20 percent annual growth



Dr. Eduardo Carrillo's St. Marie Clinic in Mission, Texas, offers a full range of medical services under one roof, including physical therapy for adults and children featuring Wii, the interactive social gaming experience.

in patient volumes and profitability, including a dramatic 1,000 percent increase in revenues over a two-year period. This remarkable success earned Carrillo and his business national recognition in 2007, when President George W. Bush presented him with the 2006 Businessman of the Year award at the 2007 Republican Business Summit in Washington, D.C.

Carrillo and his team have achieved this remarkable success by making a number of innovations. First, they created a unique business model and legal structure that allow their clinics to provide a full range of medical services under one roof, including adult and pediatric practices, radiology services, laboratory services, home health services, a pharmacy, and physical, speech, and occupational therapy. "It's a one-stop shopping environment that provides greater convenience and more integrated care for our patients," he said. "At St. Marie Clinic, we believe that strong interactions are important and are at the heart of quality of health care. This is why we work hard to build relationships and trust with patients. Our internal network of providers, pharmacies, rehabilitation centers, laboratory, radiology services, and home health services offers the full continuum of care patients need throughout their lifetime."

Carillo has also introduced Lean techniques into the company's operations and culture. "The goal of Lean, first and foremost, is to provide value to the patient—our customer," Carrillo said. "So we are looking at every step in the process of serving patients, and exposing our 'flaws' with the goal of eliminating all non-value-added activities." (Manufacturing organizations, such as Toyota, have successfully implemented Lean principles and the six-

sigma approach to process improvements for decades.)

As part of this continuous improvement process, Carrillo and his team have restructured their workday to better accommodate their patients' busy schedules. Physicians work staggered schedules to cover the two-hour period over lunch when many other doctors' offices are closed. As a result, St. Marie Clinic has dramatically reduced patient "bottlenecking" and waiting times. "We still have our work cut out for us," Carrillo noted, "but we are taking significant strides toward creating a better clinical environment where what is supposed to happen does happen, on time, every time."

In addition, St. Marie Clinic has created a unique program to provide care for individuals and families without health insurance. By offering uninsured patients access to all the clinic's services at deep-discounted prices, the Patient Discount Program provides a safer and more convenient alternative than seeking treatment in Mexico.

Almost 10 years out of medical school and intensely focused on serving the underserved in South Texas, Carrillo isn't too busy to recognize the daily benefits he derives from the continued success of his alma mater. "The providers who have worked for me the longest, who have the best bedside manner, and who gladly stay late until the last patient is seen, are graduates of the UT Health Science Center in San Antonio," he remarked. "So compared to the competition, the School of Medicine must be doing something right!"

Editor's Note: In December 2009, Dr. Carrillo was elected to the Alumni Association Board of Directors for a three-year term. He will also serve as chair of the new Rio Grande Valley Alumni Chapter.